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GIVEN BACK:

A POEM,

Dedicated (without Permission), with all
Love and Loyalty,

TO

H.R.H. THE PRINCESS
OF WALES.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF
"TEACHINGS FROM THE CHURCH'S YEAR."



Oxford and London:
JAMES PARKER AND CO.
PLYMOUTH: S. BOWERING.

1872.





PART I.

"A voice of wailing is heard, for death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the young men from the streets."

"**A** VOICE of wailing!" As the prophet spake
In the far-distant time, so is it now :
Within our palaces a vision dread
Of doom and death is seen ; his hand is laid
Upon the form of one around whose brow
The hopes of many cluster. Ah ! weary sight ;
Ah ! weary sight and sad ! youth, health, strength,
nerve
Withering 'neath fever's grasp. Will youth,
And health, and strength, and nerve be powerless
To turn the tide of battle ? will the skill
And the wise forethought of the men to whom
The gift of healing has been given,
Baffle the foe ? His quiver's stored
With arrows, subtle, and keen, and sharp ;
And with relentless power he sends each shaft
Where it will wound the deepest.
Is there no hope ? can no worn life be found
As ransom for this one, so fenced around
With love, and love's amenities ?
Is the deep agony which fills that home
To find an echo in the outer world ?

In that war, none may redeem his brother ;
None e'er hope to turn aside his share
Of human pain, and care, and suffering.
Rarely, if e'er before, has such a scene
Saddened our country's history ; for
Rarely before have we been privileged
To look so closely at the inner life
Of those whose place is in the courts of kings.
" One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,"
The poet sings ; and as we look within
That saddened chamber, where still, hour by hour,
The strife 'twixt life and death is carried on,
And mark how state and rank are set aside,
And prince and people meet on common ground,—
The common ground of need and ministry,—
Our eyes brim o'er, and to the watching world
We tell what claim there is on loving prayers.
Death came by sin ; as all have sinned,
So all must pay its penalty.
And time comes oft when, to the wearied soul,
The grave brings perfect rest ; when the ripe corn
Is ready for the sickle. But the young,
The strong, the beautiful, love the sweet world
Which God has made so fair :
And he, now writhing on that bed of pain,
Is over young to die ; and life for him
Has duties onerous, as well as blessings.

See that bending form, close-gathered
Where eye and ear can note the faintest change,
The whilst her heart is poured out in prayer :
'Tis but a few short years since first she came,

A stranger-girl among us ; and by
Her radiant grace, and loveliness,
And woman's truest witchery,
Stole all men's hearts towards her.
And now, beside the dying bed of him
In whose high name her claim to England's state
Was registered, she crouches low ;
Stifling, for that dear sake, the agony
Which yet, at times, seems more than can be borne.
Her love, her lord, her husband,
The father of her children, brought thus low !
Never again to see him in their midst,
To hear him answer to the sweet pet name
Her love had given ; never again,
With their dear little ones, to whoop and call—
Himself scarce more than boy—'mid the gay band.
Nay, to herself the travail-time may come,
And sire and child ne'er meet on this glad earth !

Another woman's form is pressing close
To the pale drooping one of the wan wife,
Now one 'mongst many, liege Lady though she be ;
And her tried heart is stirred within her,
And this new woe seems all too hard to bear.
But ten short years told back, and she was called
To " pass beneath the rod ; " and now,
Oh bitterness ! her child, his child,
The first^a God gave unto their love and care,
Lies stricken with like doom !
And brothers and sisters gather round,

^a The first-born son.

Some with pale lips, and faces blanched with fear,
At the unwonted danger.
Others who, 'mid the dire surroundings,
Still fondly cling to hope ; and one there is,
Who, from her distant home and close-knit ties,
Has journeyed hitherward, to take her part
In every meet and loving tendance ;
And mingled with the group of kith and kin,
Are men to whom all eyes are turning,
As though they were the oracles of fate ;
Men who keep watch and ward, who fence and parry
Each thrust the insatiate, wily foe
Gives to the weary, pain-worn body.
Another, armed with holy Church's power,
For him, for all, has words of solace sweet ;
And thus bids hope, whatever may betide.
Others there be, whose thoughts will flee away
E'en from that scene of trial, and forecast
The hopes and fears of England's future,
Should this fair link between her and the crown
Be severed now. And still the hours creep on :
Day deepens into night, and night again
Is merged in morning, and there comes no change
Unto the "graver symptoms."
Ah ! dire suspense and drear : will He,
Whose servant bade the people come
To His own temple, and upraise the prayer,
When grief or sickness sore oppressed them,
Be silent now, when from a thousand roofs
Of hallowed temples, studding this fair land,
The prayer uprushes ?

When, from a myriad hearts and lips
The cry outpours, "Father, in mercy spare?"
Oh! will He, who gave Elijah power
To wrestle with the foe at Zarephath,
Refuse to bless the means and remedies
Unstintly used and lovingly applied?
And oh! will He, who once upon a time
Healed the ruler's servant by a word,
And at the gates of Nain brought back to life
The widow's son, withhold His aid
When she, our well-loved Queen, a widow too,
Impleads in agony, for her firstborn?
There comes no answer yet to tears and prayers;
And still the hours creep on, and still
The symptoms lose no jot of gravity.
Death, thou art strong and masterful,
Yet is there One who stands above us all!
And so we watch, and pray, and wait.





PART II.

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church. . . .

"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

"Honour a physician with the honour due unto him, for the uses which ye may have of him. For the Lord hath created him."

ANOTHER day has dawned,—a day
Whose darkened memories seem presages
Of coming woe! and England's heart
Is heavier now; and England's pulse
Beats low, and every breath is hushed,
And every ear close-strained
To catch the faintest whisper.
Nearer and nearer to the sick man's door
Creeps the destroying angel! his hand
Has not been stayed from other spoil
During those days of peril:
The young, the old, the middle-aged,
Those in high places,
And poor ones of the earth,
Have all been gathered in.
Yet is he still insatiate;
Not for one second has his eager watch
On that pale form relaxed: and now,

As each sad hour creeps on and brings no change,
Nearer and nearer comes he, and the door
Seems all ajar to give him entrance !

A nation's hope may pale ; a mother's heart
Be wrung ; a wife left desolate,
And skill have lost its cunning,
Or ever he will turn from that dread watch !
And still within the sick man's chamber
The mortal fight goes on :

Mists from the valley dark are gathering now
Closely around him ; and in the balances
High poised, and ready for the touch,
Are life and death : and in the outer world
Are eager suppliants to Him
Who can determine, by a single word,
The issue of this long-tried contest.

Never before has England bent
'Neath such a common impulse ;
The public weal, and private joys and griefs,
Seem merged in the one interest :
Who can be glad ? or who think much
Of their own pleasures, or their petty cares,
Whilst death and danger lurk so near to all ?
Mammon himself is now left desolate ;
His worshippers, with bated breath, speak low,
And dare not own their master.

And Moloch, at whose chariot-wheels
Despotic fashion binds her votaries,
Has lost his royalty ; and Daniel's cry,
"There is no God but God, He is the Lord,"
Ascends from earth unto His throne above !

And still the hours creep on, and even yet
The battle rages hotly ; and still he,
The paly spectre, stands beside the door.
“Sire and son are mine by right of conquest,”
Burns upon his lips ; in his right hand
The scythe seems newly whetted,
And the inverted hour-glass in his left
Shews but a few more sands to run.
But list ! a murmur—first within that room
Where thoughts, and hearts, and nerves are strained
To such high tension, that even hope
Will be another agony, 'tis heard ;
And next to those who bear it lovingly
On to the eager crowds who wait without ;
And soon it gathers force, and onward speeds,
Borne by electric power to every home
Of this fair realm ; and England rises up,
And with a sob of gratitude to God,
Dares once again to hope !
To hope ! yea, verily, e'en though there be
Days, weeks of pain and weariness
For the sick man to bear ; though there be
Days, weeks of anxious care for loving hearts
To suffer, ere the resting-time may come ;
Days, weeks of unremitting skill, in which
The threads of life, so weakened now,
Must once again be gathered up,
And made to work in unison ;—
Yea, England dares to hope ! a lull has come
In the dark storm : the cloud has riven been,
And shews its “silver lining ;”

And he, whose shadow for so long a space
Has darkened that doorway,
Kneels, and looks, and closely scans its "lintel"
And its "posts !" What seeks he there ?
A sign, which He the Lord of Hosts will give,
If in His tender love and mercy,
And if in answer to His people's prayer,
He will give back their firstborn.





PART III.

"There will be no more bulletins issued."

Sandringham, Jan. 14, 1872.

"Long live our noble Queen!"

"God bless the Prince of Wales!"

AND England breathes again! the dire suspense
Which for so long a time
Has palsied all her strength, is over now,
And hand, and heart, and head may back to duty.
Yet ere we rise and haste to set aside
The sackcloth, and to shake away the dust
Of sweet humility, were it not well
To retrospect awhile? were it not well
That each should con the story of the time,
And wrest from it its lesson?
Will not he, the royal sufferer,
Stricken thus low, amid the plenitude
Of youth, health, strength, rank, power,
When life was girdled by a thousand joys,
Which, from their very affluence,
Was thickly strewn with dire temptations;
Will not he, whose feet have journeyed near
To the dark river, and whose eyes
Have closely looked upon death's mysteries,
Come back to life and its behests
A wiser and a better man?

Aye, better, for the best e'en needs improving.
And wiser he must surely be ;
For who would shun to suffer e'en as he,
To glean such knowledge ? thus to find
That the pure love, and trust, and sympathy
Of noble England is his heritage ?
And she, the sharer of his life and love,
Who watched the loosing of the " silver cord,"
And with a woman's calm endurance
Strove hard to hide a woman's deep distress,—
Will not her joy and thankfulness,
At having back one whom she feared was lost,
Bear fruit in even purer love and trust ?
The lesson, too, will have its reading
To those who, summoned to that saddened home,
Looked on their brother ;—some, perchance,
Scarce realising, then, their full bereavement,
The while their hearts were stricken to the core.
It may be in the time to come
That one, or each of them in turn,
Amid the bright and glowing pleasures
Which do hedge their state,
May feel placed high above the common lot ;
And then the memory of that trial-time
Will bring them back to earth's vicissitudes.
Again, to him who by the right
Of tried affection—higher still,
As one of God's ambassadors—
Wrestled in prayer for him, a lesson lies.
For evermore in season,
Aye, and out of it, if need there be,

He must remind his princely pupil,
When earth and its bright pleasures seem too close,
How near the "golden bowl" had broken been,
How very near the "wheel" stopped at the cistern ;
Must teach that "power comes from God alone,"
And "sovereignty from the Lord Most High."
And can the time of anxious watching
And uncertain ends e'er die away,
Or pale within the memories of those
Who, having "skill and healing from the Lord,"
Used it in full accord and harmony ?
A nation's thanks and praise are theirs :
And as the wise man taught of old
That the "physician's skill should raise his head,"
And cause the great men of a land
To look with admiration on him ;
Also that to him, from the hands of kings,
Honours and gifts should come,—
So be it with the three ! And yet methinks
No rank, no power, no state
Will give to them more lustre and renown
Than that which breathes in British gratitude.
And for that British people's self—
How will they now interpret
The meaning of that "writing on the wall ?"
At the time they rose to the occasion,
And fierce anarchy, and that
Which laughs to scorn the right divine of kings,
Was beaten down, and hid its hydra head ;
And all the grace which springs from loyalty
Flung its rich perfume over our dear land.

What will come next? Ah! but the King of kings
Has in His keeping all things,
And to Him the issues may be left.
And "last, not least,"—for last at times means first,—
The Lady of our land!
Is she so set above all common life
That, pain and sorrow gone, she will pass on
And find no meaning written on its pages?
We trow not. She has pressed life's bitter herbs
Until her feet seem nevermore
As they would walk in sunny pastures:
The cup of sorrow to her lip was placed,
And in it there was woe and sad bereavement.
A hand was raised to smite, and one fell stroke
Took from her all which she had learned to prize
In the one name of Husband;
And her weary heart sent out the bitter wail,
"My house is left unto me desolate!"
To fathom quite this agony of grief,
One should be Queen and wife.
But years have come and passed,
And though within the palace-home
The one so loved and valued "is not,"
Though the place which knew him then
Knows him no more for ever,
Still for her, life is not quite bereft
Of all its blessings; for around her feet
Are gathered sons and daughters;
And of those he left unto her care,
Not one but lives to bless and comfort her:
And thus the bitter waters are made sweet.

And then to be a Queen,
And wear its state right royally,
Means more than many wot of.
It is, e'en when the heart is bowed
Beneath the weight of many a private care,
To live another life for public weal ;
To stand erect, and in a people's love,
And care, and loyal sympathy,
To find new happiness. It is, as now,
When a dark cloud is lifted from the land,
And the blue sky shines o'er us,
To have the right and privilege
To lead a nation forth, and at their head
To kneel in God's own house, and thank Him there
For such great mercy given ;
Mercy to her, and through herself to them.

* * * * *

Yea, in our trial-time upon the Lord
We waited, and the vow we promised then
Must needs be kept ; the sacrifice of praise
Be offered up to Him our Helper.
Thy gates are beautiful, O Zion !
And within them, now and evermore,
Be honour, laud, and glory given
Unto the " King of kings, the Lord of lords !"



